



The Elusive Embrace: Desire and the Riddle of Identity

Daniel Mendelsohn

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A provocative, profoundly moving literary debut--part personal history, part cultural commentary--that announces a writer of dazzling originality.

In an emotionally charged narrative that weaves together past and present, the personal and the scholarly, a young critic and classicist takes us on a search for the meaning of identity--while showing, through remarkably fresh and accessible readings of such classical Greek and Roman writers as Catullus and Sappho, Ovid and Sophocles, how ancient stories continue to hold truths for us today.

The landscapes through which Daniel Mendelsohn takes us: the deceptively quiet streets of the suburb where he grew up, torn between his mathematician father, who sought after scientific truth, and his Orthodox Jewish grandfather, who told "beautiful lies"; the Southern university, steeped in history and secret traditions, where he first experienced seductions both sexual and intellectual; Internet chat rooms and the streets of Chelsea, Manhattan's newest gay ghetto, where "desire for love" competes with "love of desire"; the quiet, moonlit house where a close friend's small son teaches him the meaning of fatherhood.

And, in a narrative tour de force that marks the book's conclusion, Mendelsohn's themes--desire and sexuality, the hidden meanings of classical and Hebrew writings, the restless search for cultural and personal identity--come together in a final revelation. In a neglected Jewish cemetery, the author uncovers a family secret that demonstrates the universal need for storytelling, for inventing myths of the self.

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